

# MALAYSIAN ADULT'S ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION ON PREMARITAL SEX, UNINTENDED PREGNANCY AND THE USAGE OF CONTRACEPTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS (AGE 10-19)

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## Introduction

Rates of premarital sexual experiences and unintended pregnancies among Malaysian teenagers are on a worrying rising trend. In Kuala Lumpur itself, one baby is being abandoned every 10 days (1). The sensitivity of sex-related issues in this Muslim-majority country creates various barriers for Malaysian teenagers to gain sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and supports. Therefore, measures to provide education on SRH and contraception as a secondary prevention for pre-marital adolescents have become the biggest challenge for Malaysian health care providers.

It is found that 37% of sexually active teenagers used some form of contraception (2). Condoms (51%) were the most popular option among these teens. This is followed by oral contraceptive method (18%) and coitus interruptus (15%). Meanwhile, it has been reported that more than half of its respondents aged 17 to 26 did not have access to information related to sexual intercourse (67.1%). These respondents were not seeking information about safe sex practices, contraception and pregnancy because there is poor availability to gain such support and information in Malaysia (3).

By providing information to young women before their sexual debuts, studies (4) have shown that this can make a difference in terms of unintended pregnancies and STD (Sexual Transmitted Diseases) Having said that, Malaysian government has not implemented sex education as a routine formal subject in secondary schools despite WHO(5) emphasizing that sexuality education in school does not lead to earlier or increased sexual activity. At the same time, parents may also play an important role making this a reality. Consequently, it is important to address how comfortable are Malaysian parents with their teenage children being advised or being on contraception to avoid unintended pregnancy and STDs. With no appropriate formal guidance and supports from teachers at schools and parents at homes, these social challenges will continue to rise.

In short, it is argued that by increasing the awareness about the importance of contraception and safe sex among adult population, it would improve Malaysian adolescents' SRH.



## Objectives

1. To determine levels of knowledge, perceptions and attitudes of Malaysian adults toward the needs for contraception among adolescents
2. To explore attitudes of Malaysian adults towards unintended teen pregnancies.
3. To determine Malaysian adults' perceptions regarding an adolescent's choices of sexual orientations and habits.

## Methods

The authors developed a 32 self-administrated questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into 6 parts which include demographic data, acceptance of the usage of contraception among adolescent, attitudes towards unintended teen pregnancy, perceptions on adolescent sexual habit and orientation and knowledge on Malaysia sexual laws. Each part contained 6 to 8 questions. Five-points Likert scale was adopted for questions which required respondents to rate their agreement. Revisions were made based on an expert's review.

The distribution of questionnaires was mostly done via social websites such as survey website and emails. Data was entered and analysed with SPSS version 20.0. Non-parametric tests were used to determine (if any) significance of differences between groups of selected attributes (e.g., religion). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency of knowledge and attitudes scores, with an acceptable values of at least 0.6.

## Results

One-hundred and fifty-nine (n=159) respondents completed the questionnaires. Mean age of respondents was 36.6 (SD: 10.12) and almost half of them were degree holders. Approximately 45% were Muslims and 25% were Hindus. Almost 60% of the respondents had their first child after the age of 25. Eighty-eight (≈55%) respondents were parent to (a) teenager(s).

- With regards to contraception, many respondents chose condoms and hormonal pills (n=50 and n=27 respectively). However, a number of respondents (≈22%) did not practice any form of contraception. These adults were aware that other than contraception, the combine oral contraceptive pills can control acnes (≈20%), reduce pain and menstrual flow (≈7%) and regulate menses (≈11%).
- The respondents in this survey were knowledgeable about benefits of contraception and negative implications of pre-marital sex in terms of unintended pregnancies and STDs among adolescent.

Demographic characteristics of participants (n=159)	n(%)	Mean(SD)
<b>Age</b>		36.62(10.119)
<b>Gender</b>		1.36(0.483)
Female	101(63.5)	
Male	58(36.5)	
<b>Level of education have completed</b>		5.83(1.063)
Did not attend school	0	
Primary	0	
Secondary school	10(6.3)	
Certificate	10(6.3)	
Diploma	15(9.4)	
Degree	86(54.1)	
Post graduate degree	38(23.9)	
<b>Household Income</b>		3.09(1.064)
Less than RM1000	5(3.1)	
Between RM 1001-5000	45(28.3)	
Between RM5001-10,000	63(39.6)	
Between RM 10,000-RM15, 000	23(14.5)	
Above RM 15,000	23(14.5)	
<b>Religion</b>		2.35(1.514)
Islam	71(44.7)	
Buddhism	23(14.5)	
Christianity	19(11.9)	
Hinduism	40(25.2)	
Catholicism	2(1.3)	
No religion	4(2.5)	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	117(73.6)	36.62(10.119)
Bisexual	10 (6.3)	
Homosexual	3(1.9)	

- Religion was thought to play an important role in influencing the respondents' perception on the usages of contraception among young people. However, the Kruskal-Wallis test reported that there were no significant differences between Muslim, Buddhist, Christian and Hindu respondents.
- Respondents were also supportive of the implementation of SRH education at schools. However, when questioned on who should be the ideal person to be involved in the teenagers' decision to be on contraception, the Mann-Whitney test revealed that the respondents significantly preferred parents to teachers (p<0.05).
- Interestingly, for respondents who supported to provide SRH education at schools and were aware of benefits of contraception, they may not agree in making contraception easily available for adolescents. Spearman's rho analysis reported a very weak relationship ( $r = 0.07$ ) between the two constructs.
- Approximately 72% respondents agreed that practicing contraception is safer than illegal termination of an unintended pregnancy and more than half of them chose condom (n= 83) as the best method of contraception for young adolescents as it offers extra benefits in terms of protection against STDs.

- Most Muslim respondents tended to agree that the uprising trend of teenage pregnancies was due to inadequate religious education (mean=3.97) while the Buddhist and Christian respondents agreed most that the trend was due to inadequate SRH education at schools.
- Approximately 42% respondents (n=67) were aware that teenage pregnancies are associated with obstetric complications.
- In terms on supporting unintended pregnant teenagers, majority of respondents felt that a pregnant teen should and can be allowed to continue her pregnancy. However, 57% of the total Muslim respondents strongly disagree with termination of pregnancy.
- Almost 17% of the total respondent said they did not know that sex with a minor (age less than 16 year old) is against the law. 6% did not feel it was necessary to lodge a police report if the sex was consensual. Majority of respondents were aware that examination of a rape victim is best done within 3 days. However 20.7% said the best time to examine a rape victim for evidence is within 5 days to 2 weeks.

## Conclusions

Malaysian adults were knowledgeable about benefits of contraception and negative implications of pre-marital sex. They were supportive of SRH education at schools and parental involvements. However, due to religious values and social norms, providing contraception and widening its accessibilities to adolescents have become a controversial issue. The second stage of the study will target on parents with teenage children.

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